



Coal Unsuitability

Concurrent with the Forest Plan Revision effort, the Forest is addressing the suitability of areas for coal leasing. Because the Forest Service does not regulate leasable commodities other than oil and gas, the agency follows the surface management responsibilities created by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and contained in Chapter 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations. It is important to recognize that subsurface coal deposits are managed by the BLM and the Forest Service is responsible only for protecting the surface estate.

Managing the Surface

The Forest Service has entered into an interagency cooperative agreement with the BLM to coordinate the application of unsuitability criteria under the general provisions of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) of 1977. This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to assess whether lands within the National Forest System boundaries are unsuitable for surface coal mining operations as part of the Federal lands review under Section 522 of the SMCRA. This delegation is made in order to: facilitate the use of **surface management agency** land use planning as the integrated method for resource inventory and evaluation; avoid duplication of agency efforts and to assure the systematic application of the unsuitability criteria and exceptions to that criteria in agency planning.

Three key parts to this agreement are:

Coal Development Potential

The BLM is responsible for identifying areas that have coal development potential. Locations with high, moderate, and low development potential have been mapped on the North Zone of the Forest.

Unsuitability Criteria

The Forest is in the process of applying the Unsuitability Criteria for Coal Mining (43 CFR 3461) to the lands identified by the BLM to have coal development potential. There are 20 criteria, and the regulation states that where underground mining includes surface operations and surface impacts, the lands shall be assessed as unsuitable, unless the surface management agency finds that a relevant exception or exemption applies.

Components that Minimize Impacts

As part of the forest plan revision process, the Forest will develop guidelines (i.e. conditions for use and protection of non-mineral resources) and/or “stipulations” for lands that will be carried forward for further consideration for coal leasing and for coal exploration activities.

For updates on plan revision, visit our StoryMap website (<http://bit.do/manti-lasalplanrevision>) or planning page (<http://bit.do/mlsnfplanningpage>). You may also contact the Plan Revision Team with questions at mlnfplanrevision@fs.fed.us; by phone at 435-636-3508; or by mail at 599 West Price River Dr., Price, UT 84501.

